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Critic's Choice



*Belle de Jour*

# Belle de Jour and Belle Toujours

**T**hough it may not equal the sublimity of his three last features, Luis Buñuel's masterpiece *Belle de Jour* (1967, 100 min.) remains a seminal work that clarifies his relationship with Hitchcock. Like Hitchcock, Buñuel was a prude with a strong religious background and a highly developed sense of the kinky and transgressive; what he does here with Catherine Deneuve parallels Hitchcock's encounters with Tippi Hedren. Adapting a novel by Joseph Kessel, Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière recount the story of Severine, a frigid but devoted upper-class housewife (Deneuve) who secretly works at a high-class brothel to satisfy her masochistic impulses. Placing her fantasies, dreams, and recollections on the same plane as her everyday adventures, Buñuel comes closer to the French New Wave than he

does before or after, and much of his secondary cast reinforces this association, including Michel Piccoli, Macha Meril, and Pierre Clementi as a dandyish gangster. *Belle Toujours* (2006, 70 min.), Manoel de Oliveira's sequel—or tribute, or speculative footnote—is less about Severine (played here by Bulle Ogier) than about Henri Husson (Piccoli again), a rakish aristocrat who discovers her secret. (It's also more about class and less about sexual desire.) Husson arranges a meeting with a reluctant Severine many decades later, and Oliveira stages their dinner like a lush religious ceremony, albeit one with a couple of witty and pungent punch lines. Both features are in French with subtitles; reduced admission for the second ticket. ➤ Gene Siskel Film Center. —Jonathan Rosenbaum